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DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH

by Peter Spiro

Peter Spiro is a poet, playwright, and a teacher “in the trenches” of New York City. He, and the students in his classes, deal with a reality light years away from the bucolic surroundings of The Monroe Institute. And yet, their experiences and aspirations may not be so different after all. Pete is a GATEWAY VOYAGE® and GUIDELINES® graduate.

I'm a writer. Teaching school is my “day job.” After dropping out in the tenth grade, I got my equivalency diploma, went on to college, and even made it through graduate school. But school has never been a joy. So it's no surprise, I suppose, that it continues to be my challenge. As Swami Beyondananda once said, “Life is like photography; we develop through the negative.”

My students are a lot like me. Every one of them has either voluntarily dropped out or been thrown out of a previous school. Their age's range from sixteen to twenty-five. Almost all of the females have at least one child; almost all of the males have had run-ins with the criminal justice system. The alternative high school program that I work in is the last stop. If they don't make it with me, they hit the streets and take their chances. It didn't take long to realize that my education courses—“Blueprints for Thinking,” “Keys to Motivation,” “Patterns for Ideas,” and “Integrating the Curriculum”—weren't doing me, or the students, much good. I needed something real, something that could change outlooks and modify self-destructive behavior patterns.

By that point in my life I had already run across the books of Robert Monroe and was listening to Hemi-Sync® tapes because they made me feel better. So one day I took a boom box into my classroom and attached fifteen-foot wires to the speakers so they could be separated for stereo. I plunked in the *Remembrance* tape and synchronized the room. Then I nearly keeled over from what I saw: kids who couldn't sit still for more than a minute were suddenly satisfied to sit, reading and writing, for hours. Even visiting administrators reported feeling euphoric for a few days afterwards. No doubt about it, this stuff worked!

So I've continued to build on this miraculous offering. And during the 1997-98 school year, while teaching in a literacy program at the Harlem YWCA, I tried to re-create the total TMI experience for the students with my feeble technology—that is, the same boom box with the extra-long speaker wires. As the students arrived they were greeted by Robert Monroe's voice on the *Morning Exercise* tape. “Good morning,” it begins, “and it is a good morning.”

As the *Morning Exercise* played, I handed out paper and asked them to write down whatever was on their minds. Then I showed them a large bucket labeled “Energy Conversion Box,” and asked them to drop the papers inside when they were done. After they had converted their energy, I asked them to copy an affirmation I had written on the board. “I am more than my physical body” didn’t quite cover our situation. So I used sources like Seth Speaks and Conversations with God. The affirmations usually sparked lengthy discussions about what they meant and how they applied to daily living. I supplemented their reading list with metaphysical books such as Betty Eadie’s *Embraced by the Light* and other accounts of near-death experiences, out-of-body travels, and remote viewing. Hemi-Sync played nearly nonstop throughout the day. I’d mix up *Concentration*, *Remembrance*, various METAMUSIC® selections and on occasion, some Mozart and Gregorian chants. Sometimes I’d light a stick of incense, burn a candle, or charm the students by tracing their energy fields with divining rods.

By the end of the year, the students were reading and enjoying it. Some of the kids even took extra books home. Even more amazing, they read them, returned them, and asked for more. I had to make a supply run to Barnes and Noble because they went through books so much faster than I had anticipated. Please understand that just carrying a book around is a symbol of weakness for most of them.

In large part, these kids experience life like combat soldiers: long stretches of mind-numbing boredom punctuated by moments of extreme terror. They don’t go to workshops or lectures or get massages. They don’t know who the Dalai Lama is, and they don’t care. However, I have discovered that nearly all of them have had experiences of the nonphysical world that they do not understand. Once they gather that I’m almost as wildly abnormal as they feel, they begin to confide in me. A student tells me that an Indian, whom no one else can see or hear, lives in her house and beats on a drum. What can this mean? A student writes to me that she can see the future before it happens and wonders if this ability is good or bad? And a student describes these weird dreams in which he’s walking around while his body is still asleep in bed. What does this mean?

Any “normal” teacher would probably refer them to a school psychologist. If they would not accept the unreality of their experiences, they’d be shipped off somewhere and given strong medication. Their track records of violent and maladaptive behavior can justify all sorts of malevolent therapeutic approaches. Physical reality is harsh; nonphysical reality is confusing. So what do they do? Sadly, they kill each other. And even more sadly, the killing has spread to places like Springfield, Oregon, and Fayetteville, Tennessee. Why do children kill each other? What are they trying to say? Do they have a message for us? Perhaps great souls are coming through these young ones, asking us to rediscover basic truths, to search for the intelligence of the Diving Plan unfolding in and around us. There are two ways to view such kids. One is as the “thug” image they project. The other requires softening your gaze until you see not the thug but the thug’s halo.

Me and my class full of thugs. But I know who they really are. I sit up front and watch them as those binaural beats masked by sounds of surf enter our ears. Students stretch in rows before me like sweet melons. Mouths move soundlessly as they orchestrate thought. The in-and-out of each breath flexes in rhythm with the surf. We've all slipped inside a tube of deep, round silence. And here is where I begin to fall in love. Is this not the essence of our mission, which is joy and the satisfaction of fulfilling the unfolding plan?

Few things change overnight. I can tell you that by the end of the year reading scores had improved. More importantly, however, a sense of connection had developed. A connection to each other and a connection to something even larger than that. These young ones are demanding connection and communion with a most impassioned appeal. What shall our offering be?

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